

Montgomery Regional Tourism Development Council

Meeting Minutes

May 25, 2017

I. Call to Order

Lisa Bleakley called to order the regular meeting of the MTDC at 9:00 a.m. on May 25, 2017 in the new meeting facility, The Lion Room, in Christiansburg.

II. Present

Lisa Bleakley	Montgomery County Regional Tourism, Executive Director
Lea Wall (v)	Holiday Inn Christiansburg, Blacksburg, NRV Mall, Director of Sales
Sam Bishop (v)	Christiansburg Town Council- Primary
Ashish Malothra (v)	Blackstone Grill, General Manager
Jojo Volpi	Montgomery County Regional Tourism, Tourism Assistant
Bryan Katz	Montgomery County Planning Commission Liaison
Jennifer Harris	Montgomery County, Public Information Director
Krishna Chachra (v)	Blacksburg Town Council
Randy Wingfield	Town of Christiansburg, Interim Town Manager, Assistant Town Manager
Michelle Raub	T.R. Collection, Owner
Tom Shaver	Inn at Virginia Tech and Skelton Conference Center, General Manager

Absent

Marc Verniel	Town of Blacksburg, Town Manager
Craig Meadows	Montgomery County, County Administrator
Becky Gabris	Milestone Development, Regional Manager
Irene Kilmer	Montgomery County Regional Tourism, Visitor Relations Manager
April DeMotts (v)	Montgomery County Board of Supervisors
Gabe Minnich (nv)	Virginia Tech, University Relations Visitor Center
Melissa Powell	Town of Christiansburg, Public Relations Director
Heather Browning	Town of Blacksburg, Community Relations Manager
Jason Dowdy (v)	Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, Milestone Development Partner
Harry Collins (v)	Christiansburg Town Council- Secondary
Connie Hale (v)	Vice Chair- Buffalo & More, Owner
Tom Norman (v)	Chair- Courtyard by Marriott, General Manager

III. Approval of Minutes of February 23, 2017

Quorum not achieved; not able to approve minutes.

IV. Discussion

- Staffing issues are becoming more prevalent. Virginia Tech and Radford students are not applying to work.
 - Think in terms of resources and partnerships for how this office can work to alleviate this problem. Maybe it is an educational thing, explaining salaries and rates. Explain why it may be a good avenue for them to explore as a career.
 - Jennifer asked, "Has there been an outreach between the Hospitality and Tourism Management (HTM) College to partner and help grow their college through this program?" The tourism office has spoken to classes, has taught classes, and the Inn at Virginia Tech has a close partnership with the college. It's a surprising problem.
 - There are about 250 students in the HTM College. The Inn at Virginia Tech has about 80 students with them by the end of the school year. Most of them are part-time, guaranteed turnover. This time of year is a tough time because the students vacate Blacksburg after graduation. May and June we have to rebuild.

It's a challenge, you have to be creative. For the entry level positions we've raised our rates. Competition with the new hotels opening. We hire all the time year-round.

- Krisha- everyone loves the idea of growth but infrastructure needs to be there.
- Lisa- Via the last STR report, our occupancy appears high during the summer, which is when we need the staff. This is something we need to work on or at least discuss.
- Lea- Maybe have a list with direct contact information of people that need employees. Places to share job postings.
- Maybe use Facebook to reach out and promote jobs internally and externally. A closed group would be a better environment. Have a network built.
- Highlights from the directors report. We hosted a Roots Rated travel writer. The opportunity came to our office through our relationship and partnership with the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation. Dylan Jones was in our market to mountain bike, get outdoors, and enjoy the things our area has to offer. We will receive 8 different stories about our area.
- Mountains of Music Homecoming occurring again this year. The festival is three years old. The Blacksburg Market Square Jam and Blacksburg Square Dance are both Crooked Road affiliated venues and will be cultural experiences this year. There are opportunities to attend and participate in the cultural experiences along with the Crooked Road concerts.
- The Lost Communities of Virginia brochure. Terry Fisher out of Community Design Assistance Center (CDAC) helped to research and design this brochure about backroads in Montgomery County along with Wythe, Pulaski, and Carroll Counties. The four counties paid into the research and Wythe and Montgomery paid to have it printed for our individual counties. The piece is also being distributed in 8 welcome center along the I-81 corridor.
- Our website is where we pull a lot of our information on shopping and dining. We are designing a complimentary visitor guide to put out. We are doing it in house to help with the expenses. The guide is almost there. As for specific rack cards for shopping and attractions, we would want to work with those specific business partners on the creation and printing of the card. We are prepared to help with printing but not cover it all.
- Strategic Planning – we met for two half day sessions in March to work on our new tourism strategic plan for FY18-20.
 - Our discussion was supported by the findings from our survey that Dr. Vince Magnini conducted.
- Our annual tourism grant was awarded to Historic Smithfield Plantation for the amount of \$1,500
- A Junior Appalachian Musicians (JAM) Program is being created for Montgomery County. It will be kick started in the Christiansburg Elementary School. The JAM program is part of the Crooked Road and will be an after school program for kids to learn how to play traditional and old time musical instruments. The program will have two aspects: music and heritage.
- The Virginia Association of Counties Board held their board meeting here in Montgomery County earlier this month. Our office gave them a tour of the county and hosted a reception in the South End Zone at Virginia Tech.
- June 1st our office will be setting up another blitz at the Virginia State Welcome Center at Rocky Gap.
- Our office has worked with Rally North America to kick off their rally in July. There will be 70 cars and a scavenger hunt.
- There has been a change in the Virginia Tech reunions to hold one large one in June 2018. First ever- June 7-10.
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Adjournment

Tom Norman adjourned the meeting at 10:19 a.m.

Minutes submitted by: Lisa Bleakley

Minutes approved by: